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THE NEW YORK

LATIN LEAFLET

25 Issues

Give Good Ideas a Chance, Come Whence They May

VOL. 1 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 19, 1900 No. 8

The internal purpose of this publication is to provide a Clearing House for secondary classical teachers in New York and vicinity or anywhere else; to afford an opportunity to younger classical scholars anywhere for the publication of their more modest endeavors along the line of original work, which might not otherwise see the light; to stimulate the teaching and quicken the student activity in the classical work in the high schools of Greater New York. The external purpose is to establish one or more College-entrance-scholarships for the most successful graduates from high schools in New York City, to be awarded on a competitive examination. The proceeds over and above expenses will be devoted to a scholarship fund. The labor involved is a labor of love.

Entered at the Post Office in Brooklyn as second-class matter, October 29, 1900.

TRUSTEES OF THE SCHOLARSHIP FUND

ARTHUR S SOMERS, Central Board of Education

On Examinations

In Two Parts

PART I — THEORY

Perhaps no other part of a teacher's work opens so many pitfalls for the unwary as the making of examination questions. To secure, within the limited space of the ordinary question paper, all the objects which an examination is supposed to accomplish, requires a certain mental perspective, some practice, and—most necessary of all—time and care. The importance of this last requirement is all too often overlooked by members of the profession. To the unthinking it may seem easy enough to write offhand a number of questions for other people to answer; but the conscientious teacher, who well knows how hard it is to keep the middle course between the Scylla of "too long" or "too hard" and the Charybdis of "too short" or "too easy", should be willing to devote sufficient pains to this most important branch of his work.

The chief ends of examination may be reduced to two: the utilitarian one of forming a basis on which to grade the pupil's work, and the purely pedagogical one of revealing to the pupil his own strength or weakness. The second of these aims may be the nobler; but, if marking is a necessary evil in school work, then in order to the attainment of perfect fairness the first must be kept well in mind.

The attainment of these ends will be easier if examinations of one sort or another are given often rather than seldom. The question whether or not the holding of examinations is advisable is beside the purpose of this paper; but it may be said in this connection that the practice of holding examinations frequently will silence the only really valid objection that is urged against them, namely, that they rouse the nervous pupil to a pitch of excitement where he cannot do himself justice, and thereby fail to be a fair test of ability. Frequent tests, given weekly, bi-weekly or monthly, and not so long or so hard as to put an undue strain upon teacher or pupil, soon accustom the latter to this method of testing his knowledge; and when a child has come to regard a written test as a common ordinary event the examination bogy has lost its terrors for him. A just estimate of the pupil's work, too, can be more easily obtained from many than from few tests.

The first requisite of an ideal question paper is, of course, absolute fairness. If it cannot be perfectly fair, it should err on the side of mercy; be too short rather than too long, too easy rather than too hard. A paper is probably too long which cannot be written by the teacher in one third the time allowed the pupil. One prominent school of this city applies this test to all its question papers, with gratifying results.

In planning a question paper, it is well first to take a bird's-eye view of the period covered by the examination, and to map out a set of questions that will include the salient features of the work done in that period. A suggestion of this sort may seem quite unnecessary, but as a matter of fact this precaution is all too often neglected. Some teachers, especially if they be in a hurry, are apt to make question papers blindly, groping their way from

one question to the next, without any idea of the paper as an organic whole. Papers thus made are always unfair. Sometimes they are full of minor details and "catch questions", which confuse and discourage the pupil at the outset and prevent his doing himself justice. More often they emphasize the hobbies of the teacher. This fault is the result of a very human failing, to be sure; the teacher does not recognize his own hobbies as such, and of course emphasizes them unconsciously. But the ideal teacher—the sort that we read about in the pedagogical text-books—has no human failings. And, really, a habit of this sort is absolutely fatal to fairness in examinations; for it is very quickly recognized. A shrewd pupil is not long in learning to anticipate just what will be asked in the examinations set by certain teachers, and after a term of indifferent work can "cram" cleverly enough to pass a brilliant examination. Instances illustrating this point are too common to need mentioning here. In large high schools, where the corps of teachers in each department form a sort of question board for their special subject, these pet notions of individual teachers are stifled in the struggle for the survival of the fittest; for an examination that is set for the pupils of several different teachers must require only what has been taught by all of them. It is the teacher in the small school, alone in his department, a law unto himself, who falls most often into this error; and it behooves him to be careful, if he would have his examinations real tests, the passing of which is not a mere matter of luck.

In this connection might naturally arise the question whether it is wise to offer pupils a choice of questions in a paper. Much difference of opinion exists on this point, but experience seems to show that a paper of this sort, if properly constructed, can test the pupil's knowledge of the whole subject quite as well as one offering no choice. It has the merit of making the pupil feel comfortable; and it is especially desirable in an examination that is set for the pupils of two or more different teachers. Since 1894 it has been the custom of the University of the State of New York to set 15 questions in each of the Regents' examination papers, with directions to answer any 10 of them. Certain limitations, however, are often observed in the construction of such papers. The first-year Latin paper, for example, contains two or three passages for translation into English, and two or three for translation into Latin; and the candidate is required to answer at least one question in each of these groups. If this were not done, it would be perfectly possible for a pupil to pass the examination on a mere knowledge of forms. The advanced Latin papers usually contain 6 "required" questions, consisting of passages for translation into English and into Latin, and give the pupil a choice of any 4 of the remaining 9. The papers in modern languages require a certain question in prose composition and "any 9 of the others". Six of these others, however, consist of passages for translation into English, grouped in double questions counting 20 points each; so that no one can pass the examination without giving evidence of ability to translate into English.

MARY RANSOM FITZPATRICK

The Scholarship Fund

We have the honor to record since our last notice the names of the following persons who have become SCHOLARSHIP PATRONS for five years: Professor Gonzalez Lodge, of the Teachers' College, Manhattan; Superintendent William L Felter, of Brooklyn; Mr J R Fairchild, of the American Book Company; Mr G P F Hobson, Boys' High School, Brooklyn. Add to these the following LEAFLET PATRONS: Mr J E Morrison, Mr H C Wright, Miss Josephine Stary, Mr Albert J W Kern, Mr Herbert Bates, Miss Elizabeth Schultze, Andrews Brothers, Mr S Warren Davis, Mr C F P Bancroft, Miss Mary A Hall, Mr Sidney Edwards, Mr F D Edgell, Mr William Howell Edwards, Mr A L Janes, Mr F Flint, Mr C W Bates. We beg leave to acknowledge a generous subscription to the Fund from Commissioner Charles C. Burlingham, Chairman of the High School Committee for Manhattan and the Bronx.

Professor Lodge also becomes one of the contributors to THE LEAFLET. THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE.

Important Notice

Professor Lodge will Address the First Meeting of The New York Latin Club

The first regular meeting of The New York Latin Club is called for Saturday, November 24, at 12 M., in the Hotel Albert, corner of University Place and Eleventh Street, New York. Professor Gonzalez Lodge, the head of the Latin Department of The Teachers' College, will address the Club on the attitude of the Latin Grammar maker toward the practical problems of the secondary Latin teacher. All persons who are interested, whether teachers of Latin or not, are cordially invited to be present. The plan is to serve luncheon (50 cents a plate) at 12 M. promptly, so that there shall be no delay. The address will follow, and adjournment will occur about 2 P. M., thus leaving the afternoon still unbroken for those who attend. Please send a postal card at once to the Secretary, Mr A L Hodges, 36 West Twelfth Street, New York, if you intend to be present, so that we may inform Mr Frenkel, the proprietor of the hotel, how many to expect. Please attend to this at once.

Information as to the conditions of membership in the Latin Club can be had at this meeting, or by referring to No. 3, October 15, of THE LATIN LEAFLET.

H F TOWLE, *Acting President*
A L HODGES, *Acting Secretary*